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SUBJECT: IRAQ: ITALY PRAISES IRAQI ELECTIONS

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¶1. (U) PM Berlusconi issued a statement on December 15 praising the Iraqi elections as a further step on the road to democracy. Noting that first indications suggested a significant Sunni turnout, Berlusconi said the vote also marked a strike against the insurgents. The statement also noted Italy's contribution to this process under a UN mandate unanimously adopted by the international community. Embassy translation of Berlusconi's statement is reprinted below.

¶2. (U) Begin text. Once again the Iraqi people have demonstrated with their own courage their desire for democracy. Today's elections, independent of the as yet unknown results, confirms that democracy is the path chosen by the Iraqis to follow towards a future of peace and liberty. I am pleased that the first results indicate a significant voter turnout on the part of the Sunni community.

It is a sign of further isolation of the terrorist forces that want to create a civil war in Iraq and prefer hate and violence to democratic dialogue. In 2005, despite the difficulties, the Iraqi people went to the polls three times, and I hope that soon they will have a fully legitimate government, freely elected on the basis of a new Constitution approved by the October 15 referendum. We are proud to have contributed to this grand test of democracy following the unanimously adopted UN Security Council mandate. People voting freely and the end of the cruel dictatorship of Saddam Hussein are concrete facts that were unimaginable three years ago. The rest is only useless polemics.

End text.

SPOGLI